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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I AND NEA/IR
NSC STAFF FOR OLLIVANT AND MAGSAMEN

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SUBJECT: IRAQI SHI'A PARLIAMENTARIAN PAINTS DIRE PICTURE OF IRANIAN RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

REF: BAGHDAD 342

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Military Affairs Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Ayad Jamaleddin, a Council of Representatives member from the secular Iraqiyya list, painted an extreme view of Iranian religious influence in Iraq during a meeting with Emboffs on February 11. Claiming that Iran is paying clerics across Iraq to deliver Friday sermons sympathetic to Iran and its political theology, Jamaleddin stated he had been urged by an emissary of Ayatollah Muhammad Sayyid Al-Hakim, a first cousin of Abdelaziz Al-Hakim and a potential heir to Ayatollah Sistani, to spread the warning about Iranian influence in Iraq. Jamaleddin warned of "Iran's ability to summon sleeping militias across Iraq" to resume attacks and alleged that Iraqi politicians were visiting an Iranian intelligence officer in Qom, Iran, under the cover of pilgrimage. Although secular in politics, Jamaleddin wears the black turban of a sayyed, a descent of the Prophet, and was most animated about the pernicious effects of Iran on Shi'a religious doctrine. He urged the USG to provide a media outlet for Shi'a clerics who will resist Iranian theology. End summary.

¶2. (U) Media outlets including Al-Arabiyah satellite channel have carried interviews recently with Ayad Jamaleddin, a parliamentarian elected on Ayad Alawi's secular nationalist Iraqiyya list, warning of Iran's encroaching influence in Iraq. Jamaleddin told al-Arabiyah on January 20 that a "quick and hasty U.S. withdrawal from Iraq means turning Iraq into an Iranian governorate," emphasizing that an Iranian presence in Iraq is more dangerous than an American presence in Iraq.

¶3. (C) Jamaleddin is among several contacts who have reached out to the Embassy recently to warn about Iranian influence, which is a favorite topic of conversation among a wide range of Iraqis. He claims to be carrying the message of Ayatollah Muhammad Sayyid Al-Hakim, a potential heir to Ayatollah Sistani and first cousin of Abdelaziz Al-Hakim, head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the political party closest to Iran. Despite Al-Hakim's ISCI family ties, he urged Jamaleddin through an emissary to "go to Washington, to Tel Aviv, anywhere" to seek help to stop Iran's nefarious project to subjugate Iraq, according to Jamaleddin. Jamaleddin said he was surprised this message was coming from the Ayatollah, but the emissary maintained that Iran's aggressive efforts had struck terror into the hearts of the entire Najafi clerical establishment.

¶4. (C) Specifically, Jamaleddin claimed to us that Iran is paying "10,000" imams across southern Iraq \$200 USD a month to deliver Friday sermons that inspire the faithful with righteous rhetoric and subtly include a positive gloss on

Iran. In our meeting February 11 and an earlier meeting February 9, he repeated several times that he was not afraid for himself or Iraq, but rather the whole region, claiming that Iran is already controlling Gaza, Lebanon and Syria. He emphasizing that the Khomeini ideology of wilayat al-Faqih (jurisdiction of clerics) is "the most vile, Satanic ideology" ever devised by man "it's much worse than Nazism."

¶ 15. (C) As for Iraq, he said, every member of the Iraqi cabinet who travels to Iran visits the religious center of Qom to pay homage to Jawwad Shahristani, who he identified as the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) official responsible for Iraq. They go to Qom as if they are going to pray at the Ka'ba (in Mecca), he said, citing in particular GoI spokesman Ali Dabbagh. He added that Shahristani is the son-in-law of Grand Ayatollah Sistani and head of Sistani's office in Qom.

¶ 16. (C) We pressed Jamaleddin on his contention that Iranian influence in Iraq is increasing, noting that Iraq had signed the Security Agreement and Strategic Framework Agreement with the USG despite Iranian opposition and that in visits to Basra, for instance, we hear from many Iraqis who hate Iran because of their memories of the Iran-Iraq war and, more recently, Iranian-sponsored militia violence. He responded that "they hate Iran, but they don't hate money." He compared the Iran-Iraq relationship to the Syria-Lebanon relationship, saying that Syria controls Lebanon even though Lebanese are, like Iraqis, strong and independent people who seek to be free from foreign influence. Likewise we pressed Jamaleddin on his

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contention that Iran controls militias in southern Iraq, noting that the violence has decreased from the period of a year or two ago. He responded that Iranian-sponsored militias have hidden weapons and retain the ability to rise up if summoned by Iran.

¶ 17. (C) When asked what the appropriate USG response should be, he urged us to stop "supporting" Iranian-sponsored political parties such as ISCI. He did not dispute our response that in fact the USG does not support any particular party or politician, and in fact urged us to provide media access to clerics who are willing to stand up to Iran. He mentioned in particular a Lebanese cleric he identified as Ayatollah Ali al-Amin.

¶ 18. (C) Comment: Jamaleddin's extreme anti-Iranian rhetoric is nothing unusual; we hear such sentiments frequently, although not always with so much colorful detail. However, it is notable that he claims to be carrying the message of Ayatollah Muhammad Sayyid Al-Hakim and that the ISCI setback in the January 31 provincial elections, which is generally viewed as a setback to Iran (reftel), has done nothing to mitigate his concerns about Iranian influence.

CROCKER